



 New York University

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**BIG APPLE GREETER VISITOR SURVEY**  
*conducted by*  
**OTIUM CONSULTING GROUP**  
**NEW YORK UNIVERSITY**

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FEBRUARY 2005

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## **Acknowledgements**

The Survey was conducted as part of a collaborative effort between four students; Pilar Espeso, Florentina Florescu, Taneika Grant, Neeta Haridasani from New York University and Big Apple Greeter.

We are grateful for the support of Lynn Brooks, Founder and Director of Big Apple Greeter. We would also like to thank Veronica Ball and Alicia Pierro for their involvement with this endeavor. Special thanks to Bill Niles and Gail Morse for their review and feedback.

We would also like to thank Dr. Hannah Messerli, Professor at New York University for her inspiration and feedback throughout the engagement.

Last, but not least, we are most appreciative of Big Apple Greeter visitors who took the time to respond to this survey and provide feedback. The information provided by this survey is invaluable and will be utilized by Big Apple Greeter to support future endeavors.

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Florentina Florescu

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Taneika Grant

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Neeta Haridasani

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## **Pilar Espeso**

Pilar Espeso has engaged in various aspects of the tourism and travel industry ranging from hotel operations to tourism planning and development. Some of the signature entities with which she has worked include Disneyland Paris and Park Lane Hilton Hotel in London. She has also conducted industry-focused research on behalf of the International Association of Conference Centers (IACC) and the Big Apple Greeter organization in New York City. Her fluency in five different languages has enabled her to work in eight countries, contributing to her keen sense of cultural practices. Ms. Espeso's professional involvement as an Operational Analyst at Lao Pako Ecolodge in Laos provided her with field experience in eco-tourism planning and development. Most recently, Ms. Espeso has participated in tourism planning field research focused on the development of a multi-faceted visitor center in Weishan, China, through the Center for U.S.-China Arts Exchange at Columbia University.

In her third semester at the Tish Center for Hospitality, Tourism and Sports Management at New York University, Ms. Espeso is working towards her Master of Science degree in Tourism and Travel Management with a focus on Tourism Planning and Development. Prior to her studies at New York University, she completed her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Contemporary History and Geography from the Valladolid University, Spain. She has also attended La Sapienza University, Italy as a recipient of the Erasmus Scholarship. Additionally, she holds a Diploma in French Language and Civilization from La Sorbonne University, France.

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## **Florentina Florescu**

Florentina Florescu, a leisure travel consultant with Liberty Travel for over 3 years, is currently working as a competitive intelligence analyst for the same corporation. Her travel experience and her knowledge in handling both individuals and groups has proved to be highly valuable to her clients and those working with her.

She earned her undergraduate degree in Tourism and Hospitality Management at the Academy of Economic Studies Bucharest Romania in 1997. Building upon her Career Diploma in Hotel Restaurant Management, her Travel Agent Specialist and Expert Certification in different travel destination (Aruba, Hawaii, Tahiti), Ms. Florescu is presently pursuing her Master's degree in Travel and Tourism Management at New York University.

In addition to her education, her language and computer skills, she brings over 10 years of travel industry experience in hotels, restaurants and tour operations in the USA, the Caribbean and throughout Europe.

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**Taneika Grant**

Through her graduate course work at New York University Taneika has acquired knowledge in tourism planning and development, marketing strategies and customer relationship management. Taneika also possesses various marketing research capabilities. Well-developed organizational and interpersonal skills are some of the other attributes Taneika incorporates into her educational and professional endeavors. Taneika has a strong interest in cultural tourism and Caribbean culture in particular. She hopes to be a major participant in the utilization of travel and culture to educate others.

Taneika Grant is currently a graduate student at New York University's Tisch Center for Hospitality, Tourism and Sports Management. She is working towards her Master of Science degree in Tourism and Travel Management with a concentration in Customer Relationship Management. In addition to her current educational pursuits, Taneika also holds a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing from Franklin and Marshall College.

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**Neeta Haridasani**

Neeta has worked with industry leaders such as the Hilton group of hotels and the Le Meridien group in various capacities as a customer service agent, a front desk agent, and a housekeeping manager. She has a unique insight into the operations of a hospitality enterprise across the Middle East and Asia. Through her university studies, she has been involved in business analysis for a number of tourism and hospitality establishments. A few of her projects include preparing and presenting a business plan for a Boston franchise of the famous New York restaurant "Tavern on The Green"; creating technology systems and implementing a plan for a mid-sized hotel; preparing a branding report for New York City's official tourism site: NYC & Co.; and performing an operational analysis on the "Asiate" restaurant at the Mandarin Oriental New York. Neeta has also prepared a Balanced Scorecard Analysis Report and presented to the CEO of Atlantis Resort in Bahamas.

Through the past two years, Neeta has been pursuing a master's degree in Hospitality Industry Studies at the New York University. Neeta is a graduate in business administration from Osmania University in India. She also has an advanced certificate in MS Office Suite of products.

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## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this project is to prove that Big Apple Greeter is accomplishing their mission statement of enhancing the image of New York City around the world through the unique experience created from the interaction between visitors and knowledgeable and enthusiastic volunteers. The study also measured visitor perceptions of New York City; which was achieved through the completion of a detailed literature review and the creation and implementation of an online survey.

Many research projects conducted not only by researchers and academics, but also by industry practitioners prove that destination image is a major factor in regards to its influence on consumer choice. Basic components of a destination's image such as price, transportation and quality are important to the consumer decision making process. However, it is important to recognize that the social dimension of a destination, which is reflected through the friendliness of locals and the opinions of other travelers, can also play a very important role in the level of satisfaction of a tourism experience.

The methodology used for this research consists of an online survey, which included open-ended, closed-ended, categorical and multiple choices questions created by Otium Consulting Group in conjunction with the Big Apple Greeter organization. The survey was distributed via email to a total of 2,934 visitors who utilized Big Apple Greeter's services.

The findings of the online survey indicate that visitor images of safety and friendliness changed due to the services provided by Big Apple Greeter. The results also show how the confidence of tourists to visit less well-known neighborhoods and use public transportation improved. This result enhances and ensures a better distribution of tourism based economic benefits among different areas of the city.

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## Literature Review

More than 20 years ago, the World Travel Organization highlighted the importance of destination image as a major factor in consumer choice:

“(…) while it is important to any producer of goods or services, the notion of image is capital importance to a country. Measuring and mastering it should be placed very high in the order of priorities for planning tourism promotion.” (WTO 1979)

Since then, perceived images of destinations have been at the core of many research projects conducted not only by researchers and academics, but also by industry practitioners and destination marketers (i.e., Ahmed 1991; Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996; Backman and Crompton 1991; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Chon 1991, 1992; Crompton, 1979; Javalgi, Thomas and Rao 1992; Hu and Ritchie 1993; Milman and Pizam 1995; Riley 1995; Sönmez and Sirakaya 2002; Rezende-Parker, Morrison and Ismail 2003).

In 1977, Lawson and Baud Bovy defined destination image as “the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place” (Jenkins 1999).

Many aspects influence the formation of images. Most authors concentrate on the functional aspects of a destination such as price, transportation or quality of services (Sirgy and Su 2000). The perception of the destination as a safe place is considered for many researchers among the most important aspect in the decision making process (Sirakaya, Shephard, and McLelland 1998; Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002; Stoppar 2002). It is also crucial in the creation of images, the social dimension of a destination, and the role of other people (McIntosh, Goeldner and Ritchie 1995). Friendliness of locals is a recurrent psychological aspect considered in the majority of destination image studies (Ross 1994).

The intense competition among tourist destinations, added to the increased interest in international tourism, explains the emphasis on image studies. The importance of tourism destination images resides not only in the influence on the decision making process, but also in the levels of satisfaction of the overall tourism experience (Chon 1992).

Researchers highlight the importance of the management of images and positive experiences. A positive travel experience will result in a positive evaluation of the destination, helping the decision maker to construct “awareness” and “evoked” sets that will serve as a differentiator factor among competitors (Sonmez and Sirakaya 2002). “The better the quality of the services at the destination site, the more likely that tourists will form a more desirable image of the destination visitor” (Sirgy and Su 2000). These elements will have a direct influence on positive word-of-mouth recommendations and repeat visits to the destination (O’Leary and Deegan 2002).

Already in 1955, Kats and Lazarsfeld demonstrated that person-to-person communications was one of the most influential means of transferring information. Even today in the Internet age, word of mouth, now renamed “viral marketing” by online marketing professionals, is considered a crucial element in the diffusion of innovation (Yeh 2001).

In his first edition of *Tourism Planning*, Clare A. Gunn stated:

“When friends return from a vacation trip, we are invited to home movies, slide shows and displays of albums and souvenirs from the trip. No matter how poor the quality of the photographs nor how biased the information may be (certainly not a scientifically representative sample of all tourists), it is absorbed and believed without question because these friends or relatives were there and obtained this information firsthand. All the comments about the attractions, services and facilities, the transportation and the characteristics of the host – are probably given greater credibility and weight than tourist advertising. Apparently, the cynicism popularly attached to advertising and promotion is bypassed.”

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"Big Apple Greeter, Inc was founded in May 1992, by Lynn Brooks, as a way to combat preconceptions of New York City as an unfriendly place to visit and do business". Since then, more than 400 volunteers have been welcoming both U.S and International visitors to New York and have been sharing their own special views of the city with them.(BAG Annual Report 2002).

As a result of its commitment and hard work, Big Apple Greeter has been evaluated by the New York Philanthropic Advisory Service (NYPAS) as being in conformance with their highest standards for non-profit organizations. In conjunction with this prestigious recognition, Big Apple Greeters, receives daily the appreciation, respect and gratitude of thousands of satisfied visitors.

Although the recognition and satisfaction of Big Apple Greeter users has been proved through satisfaction surveys, media coverage and visitors communications, there is still a question to answer: is Big Apple Greeter affecting the perceptions and image of New York in the minds of visitors who utilize their services?

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the psychological impacts of the services provided by the Big Apple Greeter organization on the visitors to New York City that enjoy their services. This study also hopes to prove that the organization is accomplishing their mission statement, "To enhance the worldwide image of New York City, and enrich the New York experience by connecting visitors with knowledgeable and enthusiastic volunteers" by changing the perceptions of New York City through a positive experience.

### **Methodology**

A quantitative approach was used to gather information on the perceptions and feelings of Big Apple Greeter visitors. A structured method of measuring destination image, including the use of a Likert scale, was utilized in the survey design. An online survey was chosen as the data collection method because it is "cheap, fast and effective"

(Gedney 2003). The survey designed by Otium Consulting Group and the Big Apple Greeter organization included multiple choice, open-ended and categorical questions. The majority of the questions used on the survey were closed-ended in order to evoke specific, straightforward and quantifiable answers from the respondents.

The Big Apple Greeter organization currently collects a large amount of qualitative information from its visitors through the use of its visitor satisfaction survey. Visitor comments obtained through the visitor satisfaction survey were referred to and assisted in the creation of the online survey questions. The online survey was created and distributed with the intent to obtain an accurate depiction of visitor feelings and perceptions about specific aspects of New York City before and after their experience. The survey also addressed various actions visitors took when they returned to their countries of residence.

Prior to the mass emailing, a pilot survey was sent to 57 visitors who utilized Big Apple Greeter's services. The online survey was created through the use of SurveyMonkey.com and sent to all Big Apple Greeter visitors who traveled to New York City in the period from October 2003 to September 2004. The survey was distributed via email and responses were collected on surveymonkey.com from November 15, 2004 through December 1, 2004. A reminder/follow-up email was sent to the sample one week after the initial survey distribution.

The Big Apple Greeter email survey was distributed to a total of 2,934 visitors. From this sample, 241 of the emails sent were returned as undeliverable. The number of completed surveys received by SurveyMonkey.com was 1,777. The percentage of survey responses received was 66%.

*Limitations of this methodology include the following: Although the sample of Big Apple Greeter visitors selected are from various countries and speak a multitude of languages, the online survey was distributed solely in English due to the broad use of the language and time constraints of this research. Since a structured method was used to measure the destination image of New York City, we recognize that this method "forces respondent[s]*

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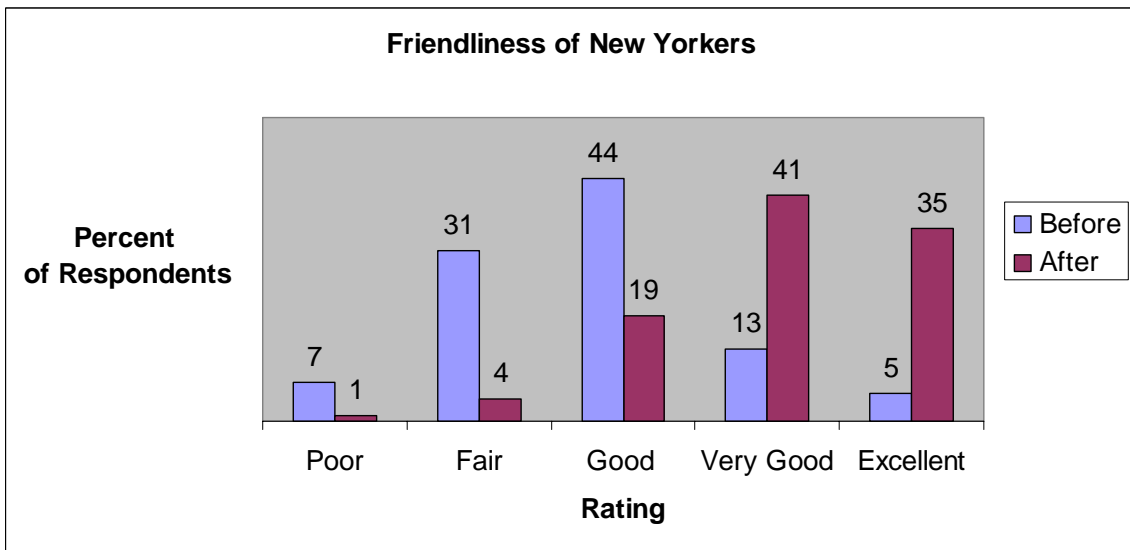
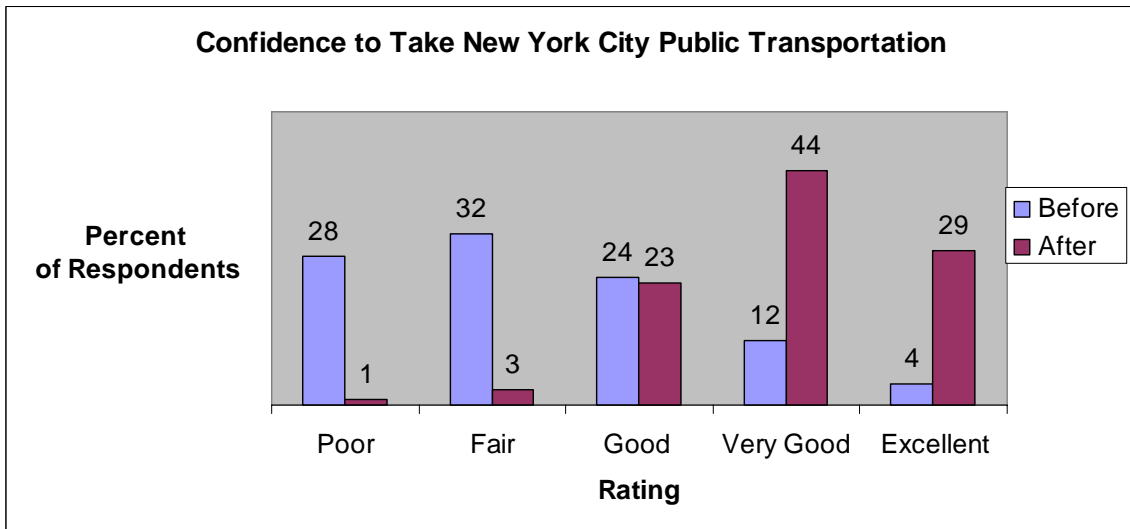
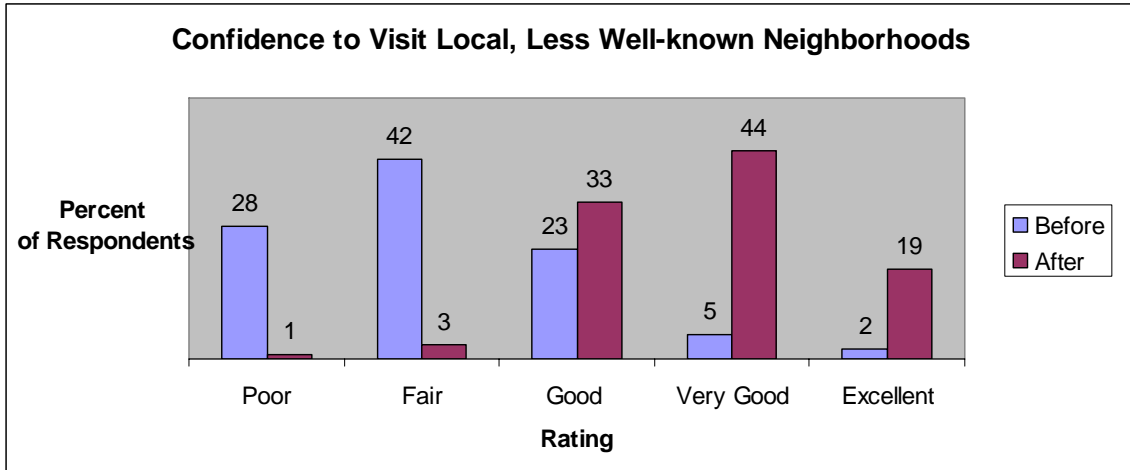
*to think about [New York City's] image in terms of the attributes specified" in the survey (Echtner and Ritchie 1993).*

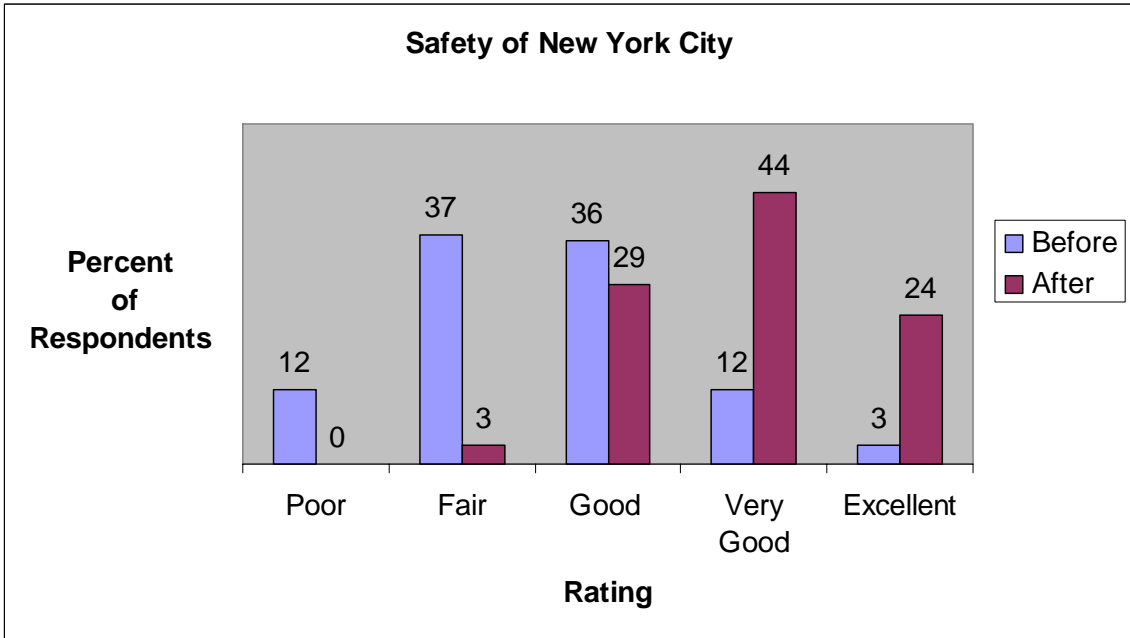
## **Results**

The questionnaire was divided into three sections, consisting of: image and perceptions of New York City; the Big Apple Greeter experience; and actions taken by visitors after their visit. A final section dedicated to demographics was also included in the questionnaire. A total of eight questions were designed to capture this information.

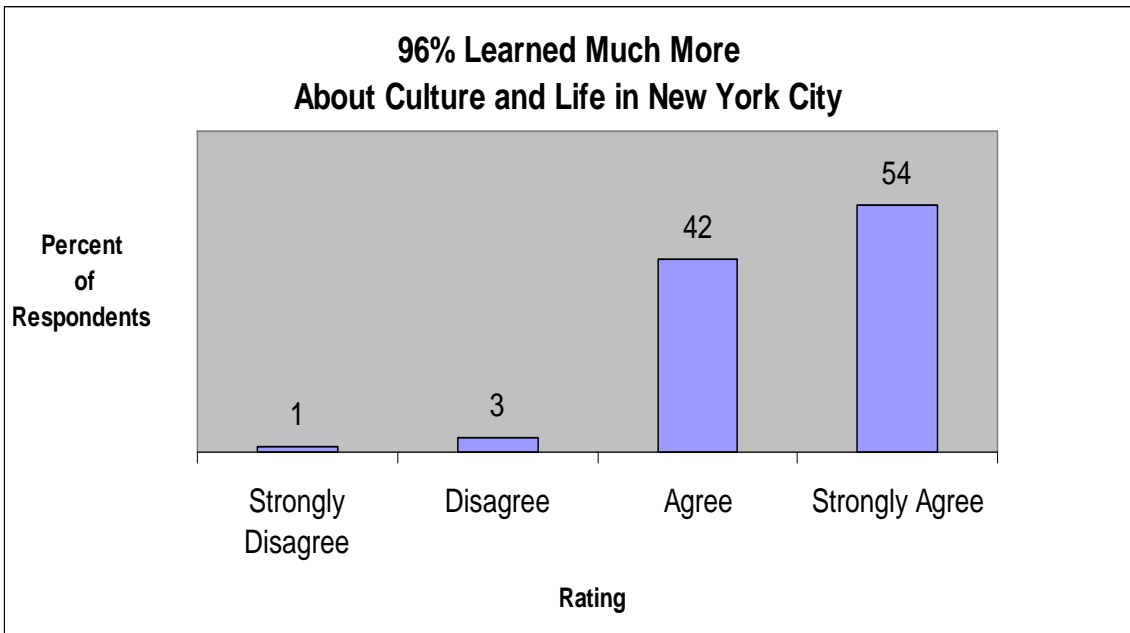
The first question focused on the visitors' perceptions about New York City before and after their Big Apple Greeter experience. It asked visitors to rate their experience based on four different criteria which are confidence to visit local, less well-known neighborhoods; confidence to take New York City public transportation; friendliness of New Yorkers; and safety of New York City. As the following graphs depict, before their Big Apple Greeter experience 70% of the respondents rated their confidence to visit local, less well-known neighborhoods as either poor or fair. After their Big Apple Greeter experience, 96% of respondents rated their confidence to visit local, less well-known neighborhoods as good, very good or excellent. Prior to their Big Apple Greeter experience 60% of respondents rated their confidence to take New York City public transportation as either poor or fair. After their Big Apple Greeter experience, 96% of respondents rated their confidence to take New York City public transportation as good, very good or excellent.

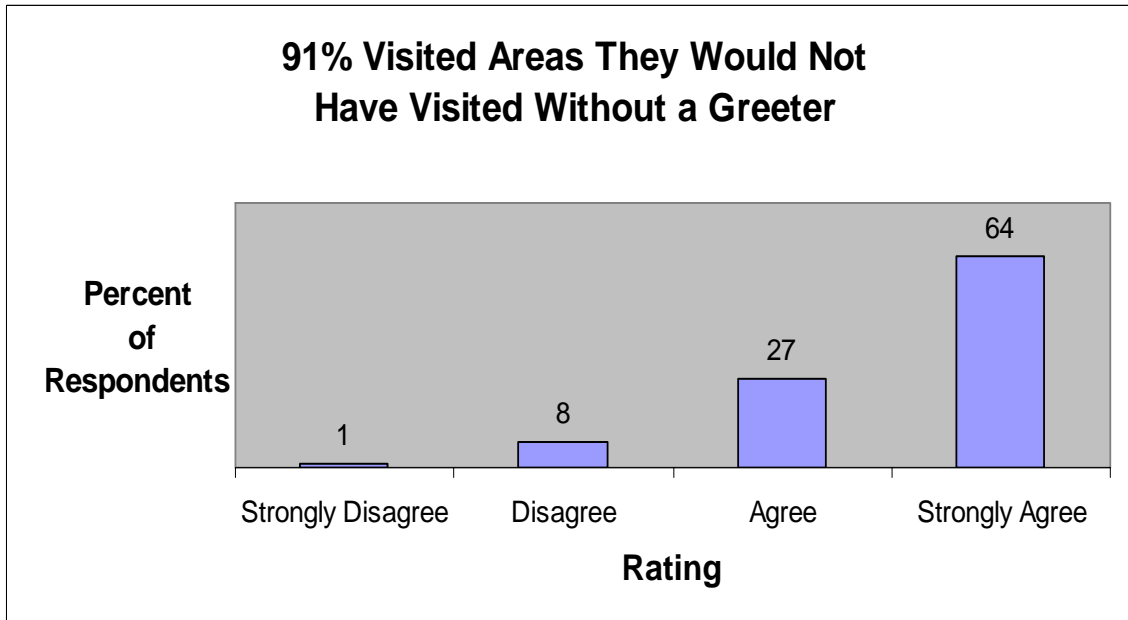
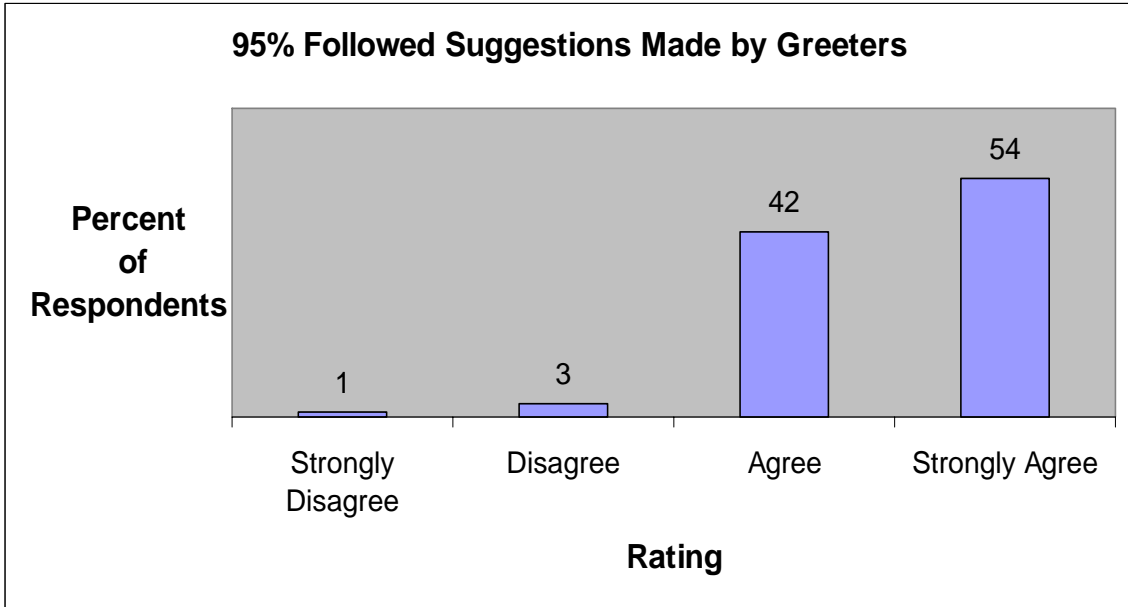
Before their Big Apple Greeter experience 82% of the respondents rated friendliness of New Yorkers as poor, fair or good. After their Big Apple Greeter experience, 76% of respondents rated friendliness of New Yorkers as very good or excellent. Before their Big Apple Greeter experience 49% of the respondents rated the safety of New York City as either poor or fair. After their Big Apple Greeter experience, 97% of respondents rated safety of New York City as good, very good or excellent.

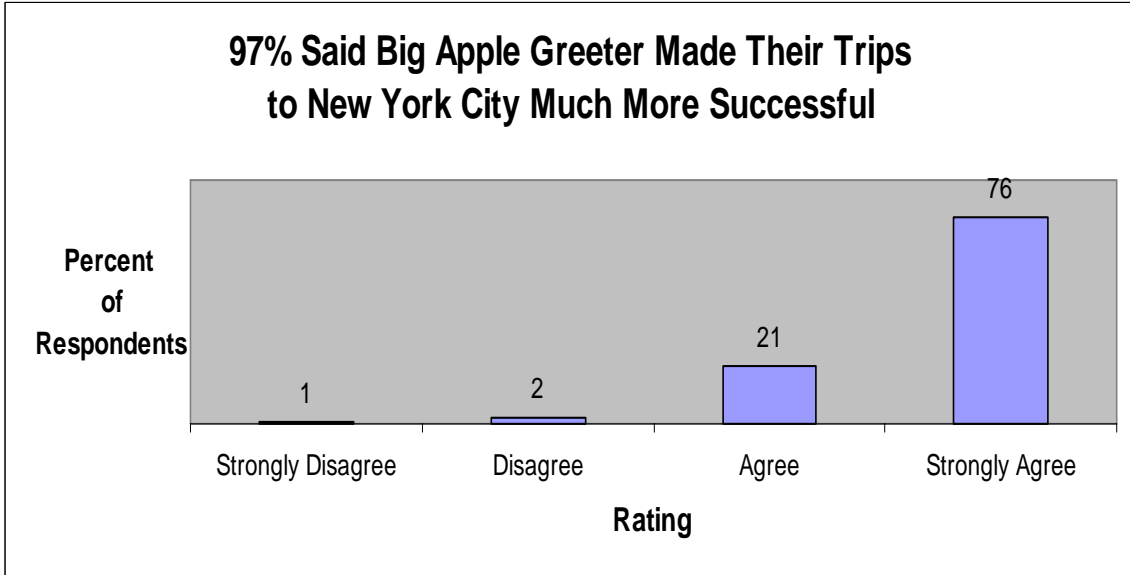




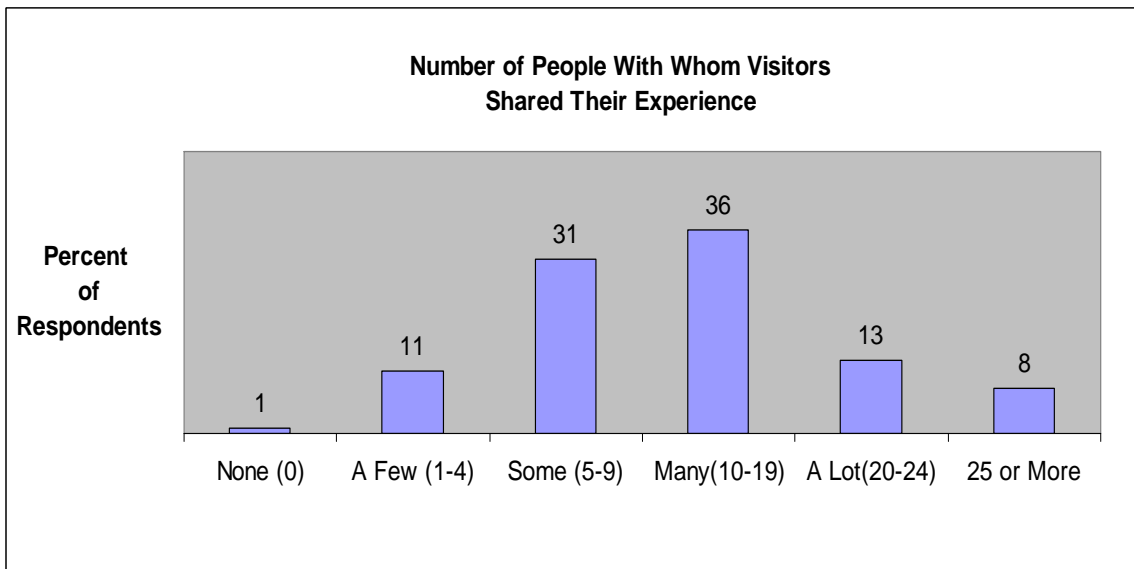
The second question addressed the experience that visitors had with Big Apple Greeter using four different variables. These were: culture and life in New York City; suggestions made by greeters; visiting lesser known areas with a greeter; and the success of their trip. As depicted in the graphs below, all respondents strongly agreed that their Big Apple Greeter experience had a great influence on all of the specified aspects of their visit to New York City.

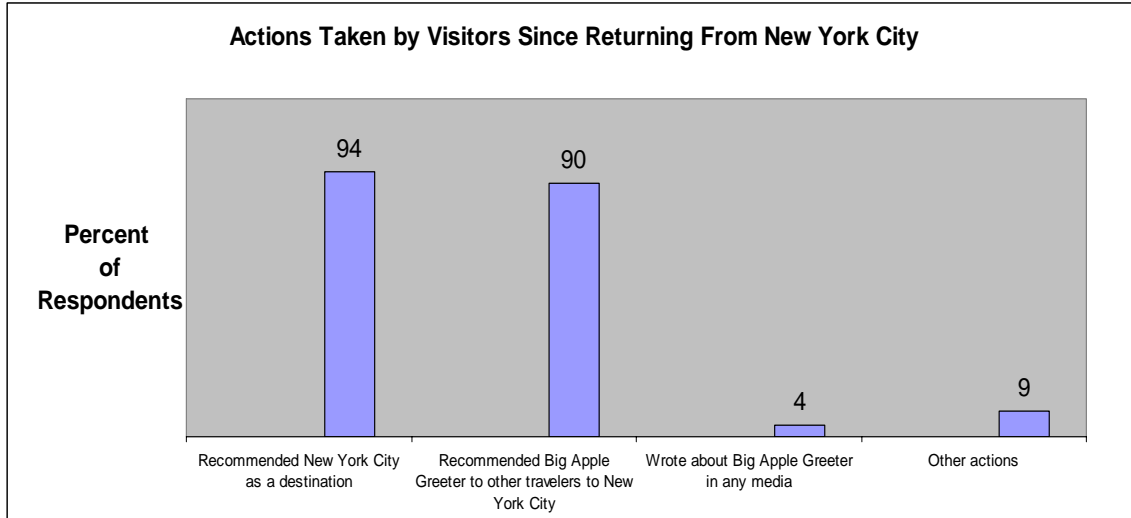




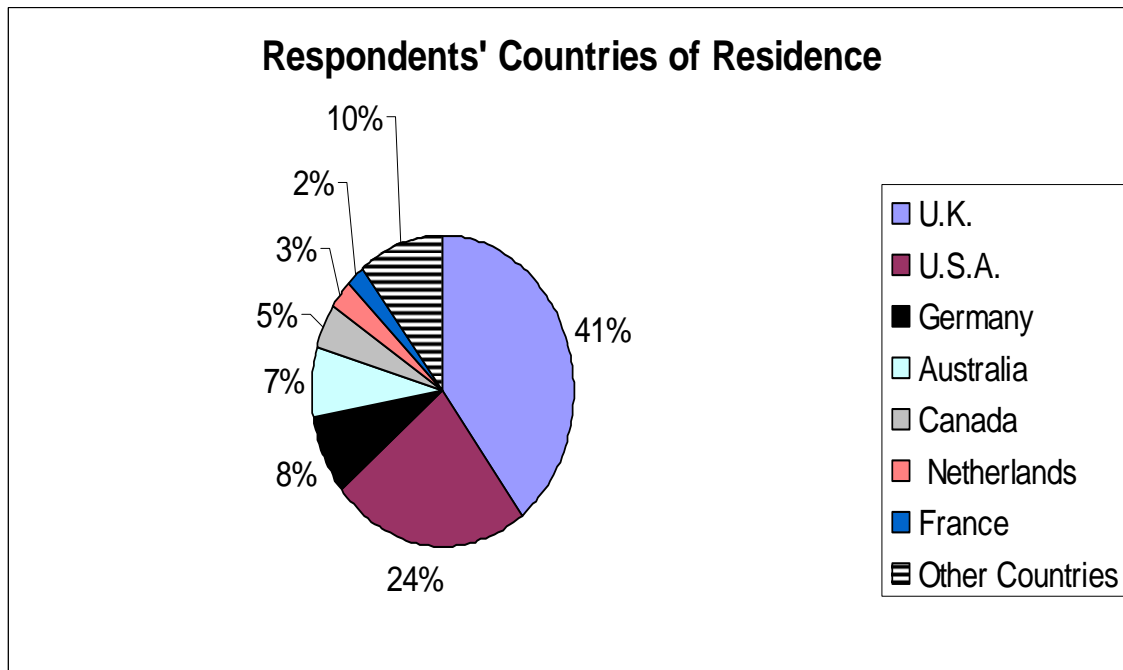


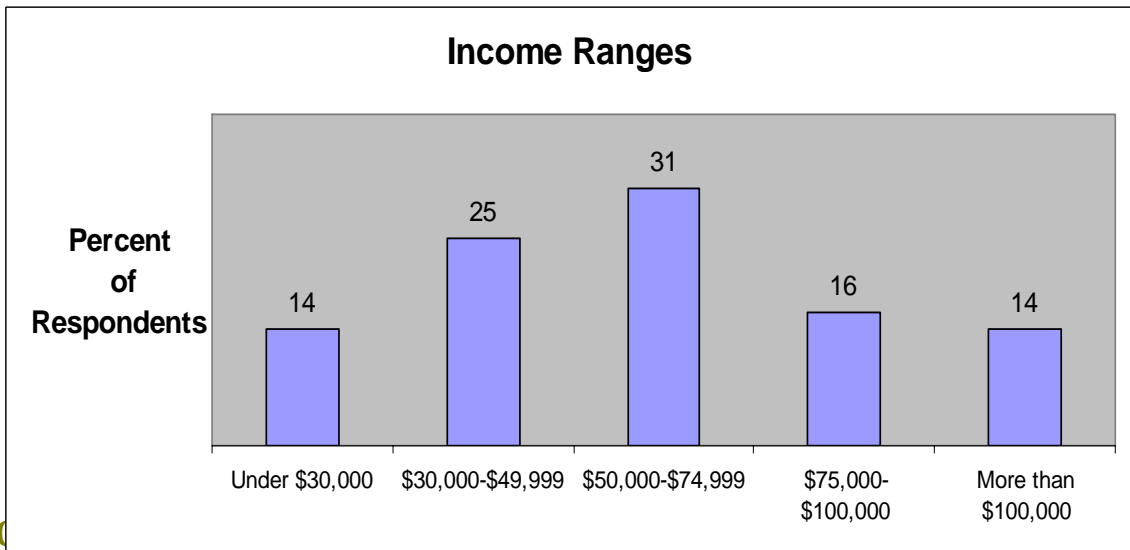
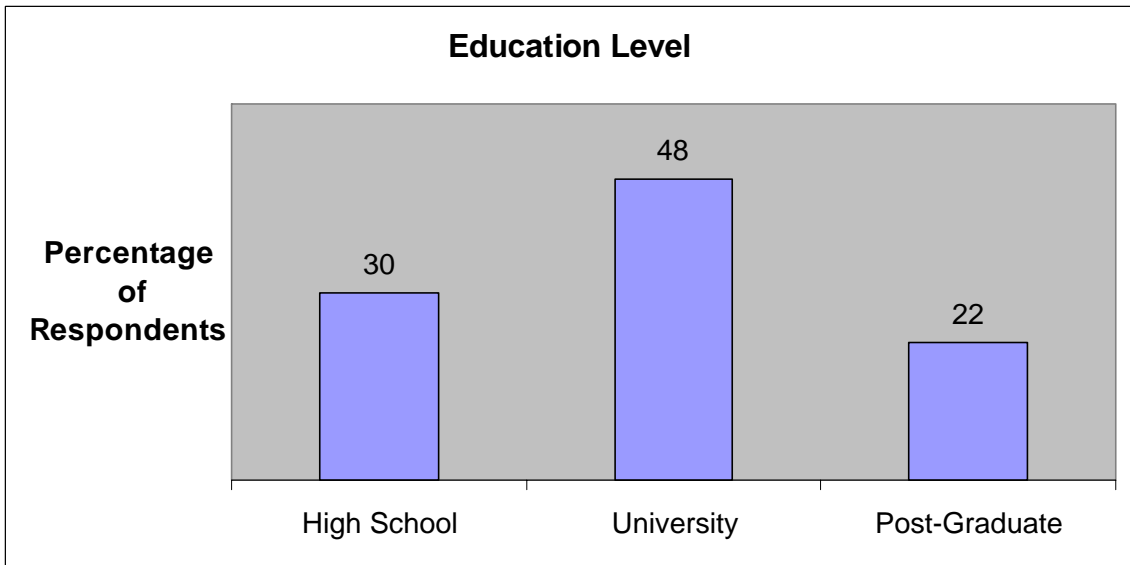
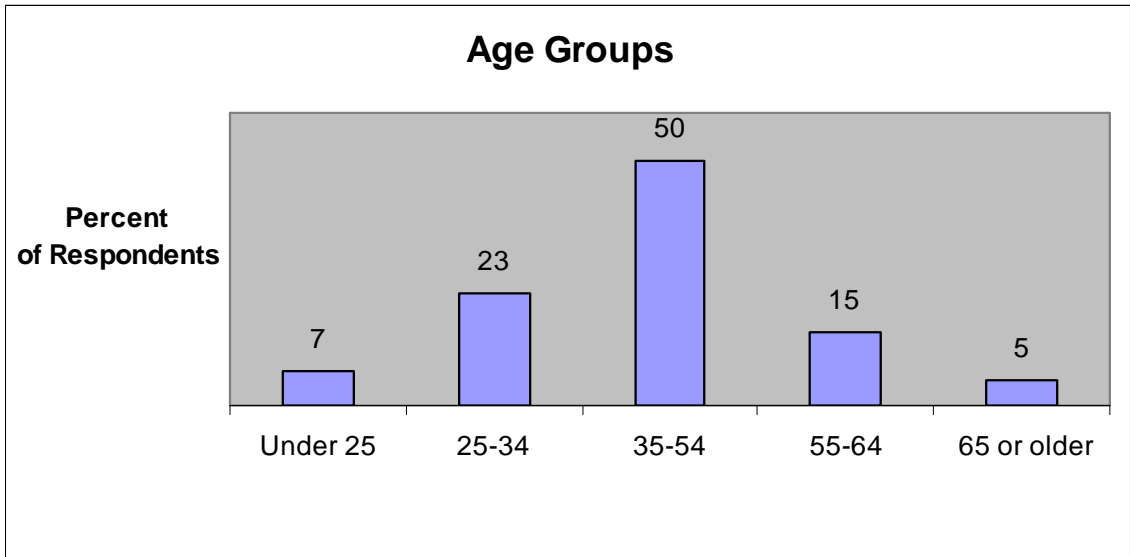
The third and fourth questions focused on the post trip actions taken by visitors. The following graphs show the number of people respondents shared their experiences with and the type of actions taken by respondents after their visit to New York City. The majority of respondents shared their Big Apple Greeter experience with 10 to 19 people. Of the survey respondents, 90.3% recommended New York City as a destination after they returned to their place of residence and 94.4% of respondents recommended Big Apple Greeter to other travelers to New York City. Respondent explanation and comments regarding actions they have taken are included in the appendix.





As the following graphs depict, the last section of the survey focused on the demographics of visitors, such as country of residence, age, education level and income level. The majority of the survey respondents reside in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Most of the respondents are between the ages of 35 and 54, have a university level education and earn an income between US\$50,000 and US\$74,999.





According to Sonmez and Sirakaya “the success or failure of the tourism industry at many destinations around the world largely depends on images held by potential travelers and the effective management of those images by the destination (2002)”. The results of the present study show the efficacy of the Big Apple Greeter organization in managing and positively influencing the perceptions of New York City among the visitors that utilize their services. The results also prove the contribution of the organization to enhance the overall visitor experience.

The findings indicate that visitor images of safety and friendliness changed due to the services provided by Big Apple Greeter. The results also show how the confidence of tourists to visit less well-known neighborhoods and use public transportation improved. This result enhances and ensures a better distribution of tourism based economic benefits among different areas of the city.

Big Apple Greeter users not only spread the name and value of the organization, they also encouraged friends and relatives to visit New York City. The respondent comments obtained show the presence of several types of “opinion leaders”. As defined by Katz and Lazarsfeld, there are certain people who have particular influence on the way their friends and associates feel about certain subjects. Marketers highlight the importance of opinion leaders to efficiently spread messages and ideas (Graham 2000). They also emphasize the responsibility that the opinion leaders feel when giving advice. Among the survey respondents, there were professors, journalist, travel agents, etc. who fit the definition of “opinion leaders”. Survey results support that these opinion leaders take pride in recommending the services of Big Apple Greeters and the city of New York.

The present study strongly supports that Big Apple Greeter is accomplishing its mission, which is “to enhance the worldwide image of New York City, and enrich the New York experience by connecting visitors with knowledgeable and enthusiastic volunteers”.

## Appendix

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I. Survey

II. Respondent Comments

III. Results

**I**  
**Survey**







## II

# Respondent Comments





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# III

## Results



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